Plato’s Republic

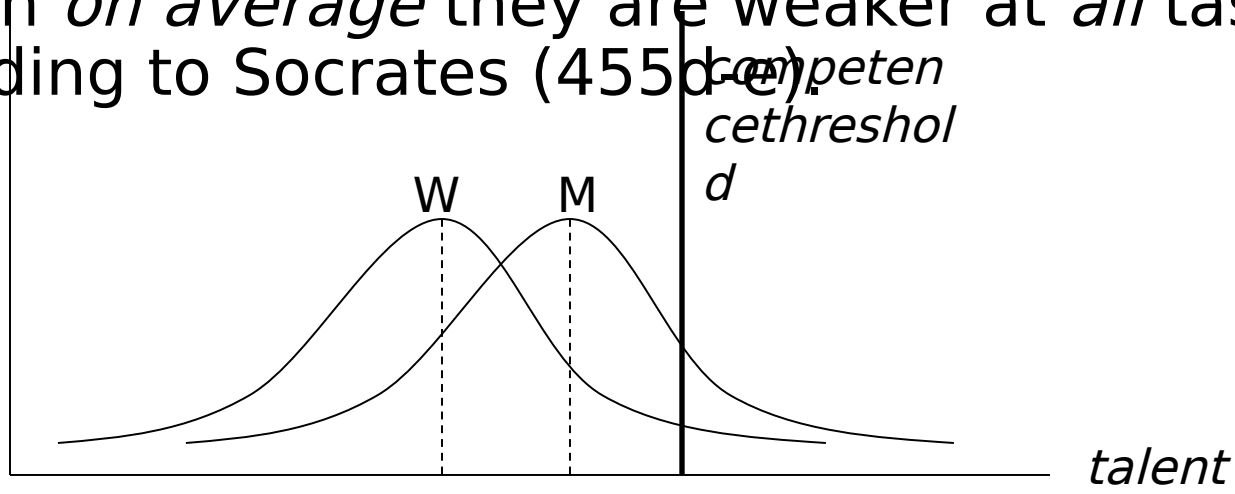
Book V:

Socrates tries to avoid being drowned by “three waves” of responses to his controversial claims about:

1. Gender equality among the guardians
2. Community of wives and children
3. Philosopher kings

Guardian Gender Equality

- Socrates argues that women shouldn't be excluded from the guardian and auxiliary classes just because men and women have different natures. Rather, we should focus on "that form of otherness and likeness *which applies to the pursuits themselves"* (454c), i.e., the only relevant capacity is *the capacity to carry out a given task*. On these grounds, women should be allowed to become guardians and auxiliaries, though *on average* they are weaker at *all* tasks, according to Socrates (455d-e).



- Note as well that women will be given only the “lighter parts of these tasks” (457a).
- Scholars like C.D.C. Reeve who interpret the *Republic* to promote a thoroughgoing feminism often point to lines here (e.g., 454c-e, 455e) that suggest women can be competent at medicine, carpentry, etc.
- However, notice that Plato does not then draw the conclusion that *all* women should be equal but rather continues to refer only to the *guardian and auxiliary classes* (e.g., 451d, 454e).
- Okin would emphasize the silence and what comes next: only when women are relieved of *child-rearing responsibilities* can they be equal (460d-e).

Community of Wives and Children

- Here Socrates discusses the *form* and *desirability* (though not yet the *possibility*) of a community of wives and children.
- ***Form:*** The rulers will practice eugenics by way of a "mating lottery." Socrates once again advocates "a throng of lies and deceptions for the benefit of the ruled," which he describes as a "drug" or "remedy" to be administered by a "doctor," i.e., the rulers (459c-d; cf. 389c). The lottery is, of course, a false one, *rigged* to guarantee that the best will breed with the best, etc. (459e-460b). **(Reveals *deeper* truth? [lot/assort. mat./lot])**
- Infanticide is advocated for unfit children (460c, 461c-d), and child-rearing is carried out by state officers and nurses (460c-d). Parents are kept from knowing the identity of their children (457d), and incest is prohibited, a prohibition made possible by "generational" parent-child relations (461c-e). (Relations between brother & sister might result, though, at least post-menopausally [461e].) Finally,

- ***Desirability:*** Socrates asks “have we any greater evil for a city than *what splits it and makes it many instead of one?* Or a greater good than what binds it together and makes it one?... Then is that city best governed which is most like a ***single human being****?”* (462b-d) The *kallipolis* is like a big family, with all citizens calling each other by familial names. (Aristotle considers this to be a “watery” kind of fraternity, by the way [*Politics*, 1262b].) A “community of pain and pleasure” is created, binding the city tightly together, and *faction* is eliminated via a common ownership of property, mates, and other relatives (464b, 464e). ***{But not for all!}***
- ***Possibility:*** Though Socrates claims to deal with the possibility of this radical restructuring of family life from 466e on (initial reference: 458b), he is accused of avoiding the question at 471c-e, and finally takes it up in earnest thereafter, by way of

Philosopher Kings

- Socrates seems to argue that his *kallipolis* is *not* merely a fanciful blueprint. He says that it was "for the sake of a *pattern*" that the *kallipolis* was constructed "in speech," and that like a painter who has painted what he takes to be the "fairest human being," he can't be held responsible for showing that the ideal *itself* (versus an **approximation** to it) is possible in practice (472c-e).
- Rather, he argues that a city that "participates in it more than the others," that makes it "most possible," that "most closely approximat[es]" it, **is** possible under one condition only: "*the philosophers rule as kings and those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy coincide in the same place*" (472c, 473a, 473b; 473d).
- The *kallipolis* is therefore best understood as a **model** for political reform, one which can be

- ***This*** is the point where Socrates begins the move from the *proto-kallipolis* (ruled by *un*philosophical guardians and auxiliaries) to the *kallipolis* (ruled by philosopher kings *and queens,* assisted by guardian soldiers).
- These philosophers are "lovers of the sight of the *truth,"* which is identified with *knowledge* but distinguished from *opinion*, which is said to lie between the two extremes of knowledge and ignorance (475e, 478c-d).
- He begins here to make some metaphysical distinctions that he fleshes out in Books VI and VII: the concept of the "form" (*eidos*), the idea of knowledge or opinion as an epistemic "power" (*dunamis*), the existence of the Good and constitutive Forms ("there is something fair itself and [one] is able to catch sight both of it and of what participates in it" [476d]), etc.
- The *language* of this entire section—especially the *visual* metaphors—is a prelude to the Myth of the Cave at the start of Book VII (see esp. 473e

Additional Points

- Plato begins to create a *new aesthetics* in this Book: he says “the beneficial is fair and the harmful ugly” (457b; cf. 452e). Plato also suggests that to approach the *kallipolis* a radical restructuring of conventional beliefs (even those regarding beauty and dignity) will have to occur (452c-d, 456c). This is consistent with his “purging” of Homeric epic poetry, restructuring of education (*paideia*), etc.
- A distinction is drawn here between *eristic* and *dialectic* conversation (454a-b). The former is carried out for the sake of *winning*, the latter for the sake of *truth*. (See both Bloom’s Footnote 14 and Book I [Socrates as sophist].)
- Plato notes that the guardians should be quite happy: he compares them to the Olympic victors (who all enjoyed common table at public expense) and thereby corrects what was implied at 419a-421c, namely that guardians might have to